

DIVINE GUIDANCE

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Preface

Before you begin your Bible study, if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, be sure you have named your sins privately to God the Father.

If we confess our [known] sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our [known] sins and to cleanse us from all [unknown, or forgotten sins] unrighteousness.
(1 John 1:9)

You will then be in fellowship with God, filled with the Holy Spirit, and ready to learn Bible doctrine from the Word of God.

“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in [the filling of the] spirit and [biblical] truth.” (John 4:24)

If you have never personally believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, the issue is not naming your sins. The issue is faith alone in Christ alone.

“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey [the command to believe in] the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” (John 3:36)

THE WORD OF GOD is alive and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit, and of the joints and the marrow, and is a critic of thoughts and intents of the heart. (Heb. 4:12)

All Scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God might be mature, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Tim. 3:16–17)

Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Tim. 2:15)

INTRODUCTION

EVERY PERSON WHO HAS RECEIVED Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is the personal representative of the Son of God. He is called an ambassador for Christ, a witness, a priest, a believer. But whatever the title, one truth is clear: Just as Jesus Christ represents every believer at the right hand of the Father, so every believer represents the Son of God on earth. In order to represent Him effectively, everyone who is born again must be guided by God. To this end we have the promise:

“And the Lord will continually guide you,
And satisfy your desire in scorched places,
And give strength to your bones;
And you will be like a watered garden,
And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.” (Isa.
58:11) ¹

1. All Scriptures in this book are quoted from the New American Standard Bible (NASB), unless otherwise noted. Verses cited from the King James Version (KJV) are so indicated. Bracketed commentary reflects amplification of the NASB translation taught in Bible class lectures (available on tape from R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, Houston, Texas).

Divine guidance is the doctrine of determining the will of God for your life. In the Bible the Greek word for “will” is θέλημα (*thelema*). When *thelema* is used with reference to God’s “will” for the believer (Rom. 2:18; Eph. 1:1), it refers to the purpose or plan He designed for every believer in eternity past.²

One of the greatest dilemmas any believer faces is, How can I know God’s will? How can I be guided by Him? What is God’s will for me in some crisis or difficulty or problem in my life?

Throughout Scripture, believers are continually exhorted to know the will of God.

So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (Eph. 5:17)

A Christian who does not know God’s will is declared to be a fool. One of the most detrimental failures in the Christian life is lack of wisdom or understanding.

Divine guidance is the communication of divine will through divine revelation—the Word of God. Therefore, it is obvious that divine guidance must be based upon the Bible itself, for the Word of God is the thinking of Christ.

For who has known the mind [thinking] of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind [thinking] of Christ. (1 Cor. 2:16)

Today, the only way you can know what the will of God is for your life is to hear and understand Bible doctrine.

In Romans 8:14 we are introduced to the Holy Spirit as the major factor in divine guidance.

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (Rom. 8:14)

There is no divine guidance apart from knowing the Word of God and being controlled by the ministry of God the Holy Spirit. Together, these basics of the spiritual life form the cornerstone for the three mandates of divine guidance.

2. R. B. Thieme, Jr., *The Plan of God* (Houston: R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 1992). Hereafter, cross-references to my books will cite only author, title, date of publication (in the first reference), and page(s).

MANDATES OF DIVINE GUIDANCE

Submit to the Will of God

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present [παρίστημι, *paristemi*] your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. (Rom. 12:1)

“Present” in this verse is the same Greek word, *paristemi*, also found in Romans 6:13, and means “to place yourself under orders” to God, or to submit to the will of God. When we understand this, we know that this is not a ‘one-shot’ decision to submit to God that guarantees submission forever after. Submission is an *ongoing* chain of decisions throughout the course of our Christian life.

We do not decide what the will of God is for us; rather, He decides His will for us and leads us step by step when we are in fellowship (John 15:16). We must be in fellowship with God to be guided by God. The only way to be in fellowship is to be forgiven our sins and purified from all wrongdoing through rebound, the grace method by which the believer in carnality regains fellowship and spirituality by naming personal sins privately to God the Father.³

If we confess [name, acknowledge] our [known] sins, He is faithful and righteous [just] to forgive us our [known] sins and to cleanse [purify] us from all unrighteousness [unknown or forgotten sins]. (1 John 1:9)

If there is any sin in your life as a Christian, you are said to be ‘out of fellowship.’ You are in status quo carnality (1 Cor. 3:1–4, KJV), and as long as you are carnal, it is impossible for you to be guided by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, one of the first steps in divine guidance is the use of 1 John 1:9 to rebound. If you are going to do the will of God, you must be controlled by the Spirit of God, for it is impossible to do the will of God apart from the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Submission to the will of God begins with the filling of the Holy Spirit—“Be [habitually] filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18b). When you acknowledge your sins to God, He forgives your known sins and

3. Thieme, *Rebound and Keep Moving!* (1993).

purifies you instantly and completely from your unknown sins. You are restored to fellowship, immediately your soul is controlled again by God the Holy Spirit, and you are in status quo spirituality. The only deterrent to the Spirit's control is sin; therefore, naming your sins is the only prerequisite for the filling of the Spirit. The *mandate* of submission to the will of God is stated in Romans 6:13.

And do not go on presenting [*paristemi*] the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present [*paristemi*] yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. (Rom. 6:13)

The *mechanics* of submission to God's will is to confess (1 John 1:9). These are simply two sides of the same coin.

Submission to the will of God is not demonstrated in one particular moment or in one particular incident, but is, rather, having the will of God as the consistent rule for your life. Submission is electing God's will to be final even before you know what His will is. It is not a question of being willing to do *one* thing. It is a question of being willing to do *anything*. It is impossible to submit to the will of God without the filling of the Holy Spirit and it impossible to know the will of God until you know the Word of God.

Know the Will of God

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good [divine good]⁴ and acceptable [well-pleasing] and perfect [complete]. (Rom. 12:2)

Along with this verse, every command from the negative standpoint, "Do not be," and from the positive standpoint, "Do you not know," is an encouragement to know the Word of God, the will of God, and the plan of God and is, therefore, essential in following the mandates of guidance. Since the Bible is the source of the known will of God,

4. See page 12, footnote 17.

whether by direct statement or by deduction from doctrine, knowledge of His will is based on an understanding of the Word of God. Maximum perception of doctrine, techniques, and promises results in the ability to be guided by God.

To settle questions and problems not specified in the Bible, the believer must go from the known to the unknown. We have a perfect illustration in algebra: X equals the unknown factor, but X cannot be determined without known factors around it. While X is unknown, as soon as we place known factors around it, we can determine the meaning of X. For example, if $2X = 10$, what is X? Answer: $X = 5$. The reason we know that X equals five is because we have known factors in the picture. Known factors determine the meaning of X.

The known factors as far as divine guidance is concerned are all found in the Scripture. With the known factors in the Bible you can understand the mind and the will of God in every detail of your life. For example, a known factor is found in 2 Corinthians 6:14, where you are told: "Do not be bound together with unbelievers." This brings up the matter of guidance in marriage. Whom should you marry? When should you marry? What kind of person should you marry? And there are many other questions involved.⁵ But one thing is definitely known from 2 Corinthians 6:14—you are not to marry an unbeliever. This is directly stated to be against the will of God. Whom, then, should you marry? This answer must be determined by a combination of known factors of the Bible, together with the filling of the Spirit.

There are many things which the Bible directly mandates to be God's will or, conversely, not to be God's will. Other things not directly stated must be determined by a rational conclusion from doctrine resident in our soul. In this way we are able to determine at any point and under every circumstance exactly what is God's will. But remember the principle: *You cannot know the will of God apart from knowing the Word of God.* Likewise, *it is impossible to do the will of God without the power to execute it.* This power is provided by the filling ministry of God the Holy Spirit. This is one of the reasons believers are exhorted to rebound, study the Word of God daily, and expose themselves to Bible teaching as much as possible.

5. A study of the doctrine of marriage is presented in tape-recorded lessons available without charge as noted on page *ii*.

Grow in the Word of God

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 3:18a)

“Grace” is the sum total of the plan of God. If you are in the will of God, you are in the plan of God. When you are in the plan of God, you should do the will of God. A full knowledge of and compliance with the will of God cannot be acquired apart from the stability of spiritual growth and maturity. Divine guidance involves one step at a time. Each step must be growth and advance in the spiritual life.

Actually, the three mandates of guidance cannot be separated, for each is dependent upon the others. We must submit to the will of God through the filling of the Spirit; we must know the will of God through the Word; and we must have spiritual maturity in order to do the will of God to the maximum. Failure to accomplish these three mandates through carnality, ignorance, and lack of spiritual growth prevents us from doing the will of God for our life.

CATEGORIES OF GOD’S WILL FOR THE INDIVIDUAL BELIEVER

The question of the will of God for each individual believer falls into three categories: What does He want me to think? What does He want me to do? Where does He want me to go?

The Viewpoint Will of God

What does God want me to think? Obviously, He wants me to think divine viewpoint. Bible doctrine in the right lobe *is* divine viewpoint.⁶ Hence, this corresponds with the second mandate of divine guidance—know the will of God (Isa. 55:7–9; Prov. 23:7; 2 Cor. 10:5).

6. The heart is the dominant or right lobe of the mentality of the soul designated by the Greek word καρδία (*kardia*) where Bible doctrine is circulated through the soul’s stream of consciousness—frame of reference, memory center, vocabulary, categorical storage, the conscience, momentum, and wisdom compartments—to support the spiritual life of the believer.

Our strength comes from the Word of God. In ourselves, we are weak. Bible doctrine is the backbone of the soul that supports our spiritual life. In order to understand the viewpoint will of God we must store up doctrine in the right lobe so that it guides all our decisions.

The Operational Will of God

What does God want me to do? The operational will of God involves everything that a Christian should and should not do to glorify God. The list of dos and don'ts includes many wonderful things found in the Word of God: rebound, the filling of the Holy Spirit, learning doctrine, the faith-rest technique, occupation with Christ, prayer, witnessing, and many others.⁷ The requirements for doing the will of God are the first and second mandates of divine guidance—submit to the will of God and know the will of God.

The Geographical Will of God

Where does God want me to be? This category has to do with location. The geographical will of God, however, is never considered apart from the operational will of God. If believers are *doing* what God wants them to do, then they will eventually wind up in the *place* where God wants them to be. We all understand that crossing an ocean or going to a foreign country does not make one a missionary. The operational will of God must come first. Christians become missionaries by first witnessing in their own locale, in their own circumstances. A believer who will not witness at home will never witness in another country where conditions are much more difficult. The third mandate of divine guidance—grow to maturity—is definitely correlated with the geographical will of God.

An excellent illustration of God's geographical will is contained in the Book of Jonah. The will of God for Jonah was to go to Nineveh, where he was to declare the Gospel. But instead of going to Nineveh, he took a ship going in the opposite direction. He was finally thrown

7. Thieme, *The Faith-Rest Life* (1961); *Christian Integrity* (1997), 117–18; *Prayer* (1975); *Witnessing* (1992).

overboard, swallowed by a great fish, vomited onto dry land, and then reluctantly proceeded to Nineveh. Jonah's problem was his hatred of the Assyrians, which created an unwillingness to execute the known geographical will of God.⁸

Another dilemma of the geographical will of God was faced by Jacob when he was to go down to Egypt. Jacob thought it was wrong for him to leave the Land, so God said, in effect, "Do not be afraid, Jacob. It is my will for you to go to Egypt at this time. But your family will come back again" (Gen. 46:1-4).

Paul, in Acts 16:7, longed to go to Bithynia; but God restrained him because He wanted Paul in Philippi and Peter in Bithynia. David Livingstone, the great missionary explorer of the last century, planned to go to China but was hindered by the war between England and China. Since it was God's will for David Livingstone to be in Africa, not China, the war in China made it impossible for him to be in that country. The geographical will of God for him was accomplished through this providential circumstance. Adoniram Judson started out for India, but officials would not let him land in Bombay. You see, God wanted him in Burma. What appeared to be a problem of immigration was actually a question of the geographical will of God.

SEVEN DIRECTIVES DECLARED TO BE THE GENERAL WILL OF GOD

A cardinal principle of divine guidance is stated in 1 John 3:23.

And this is His commandment [His will], that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. (1 John 3:23)

This verse reduces the will of God to utmost simplicity. The verse is divided into two parts. First, God's will for the unbeliever is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, His will for the believer is to acquire virtue-love, the epitome of the spiritual life.⁹

8. Thieme, *Old Sin Nature vs. Holy Spirit* (1973).

9. Thieme, *Christian Integrity*.

Salvation

It is the will of God that every member of the human race be born again. We know from 2 Peter 3:9b that God is “not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance [a change of mental attitude toward the Lord Jesus Christ].” And because God is not wishing for any to perish, He has made provision for eternal life through Jesus Christ. There is only one issue for an unbeliever: What do you think about Christ? Every human being begins to comply with the will of God when he expresses faith alone in Christ alone.

And the world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:17)

Doing the will of God in this case is *believing* in the Lord Jesus Christ.

“For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.” (John 6:40)

“Whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16b)

So first of all, it is the will of God that every member of the human race be saved. God Himself made this possible by sending His “only begotten [uniquely born] Son” (John 3:16b) to accomplish the work of salvation.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died [as a substitute] for us. (Rom. 5:8)

When the Lord Jesus Christ, the God-man and unique Person of the universe, hung on the cross between heaven and earth, He bore our sins and took our place. We were under the condemnation of death (John 3:18); yet Jesus Christ was judged for us.

He [the Father] made Him [Christ] who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf [as our substitute], that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor. 5:21)

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.” (John 6:47)

It is impossible to do the will of God until one begins at the cross. Jesus said to a very religious man, "You must be born again" (John 3:7b).¹⁰ To others He said:

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me." (John 14:6b)

"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies." (John 11:25b)

"The one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." (John 6:37b)

"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." (Matt. 11:28)

"And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

Over and over again God declares in His Word that it is His will for all members of the human race to believe in His Son. Jesus Christ bore the sins of every human being (1 John 2:2). He paid the penalty for sin in full, redeeming mankind from the slave market of sin (Gal. 3:13).¹¹ When He cried out on the cross, "It is finished," (John 19:30b), salvation was accomplished.¹² Appropriation by faith is the only condition for doing the will of God in salvation.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. (Eph. 2:8-9)

"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:36)

After the unbeliever enters into the will of God through salvation there are other general directives of God's will that define the spiritual life of every believer.

10. Thieme, *The Barrier* (1993); *The Origin of Human Life* (1993), 31-34.

11. Thieme, *Slave Market of Sin* (1994).

12. Thieme, *King of Kings and Lord of Lords* (1974).

Sanctification

It is the will of God that all believers be sanctified.

For this is the will of God, your sanctification. (1 Thess. 4:3a)

“Sanctification” here means to be set apart unto God by being in fellowship with the Lord, so that you will be under His direction, ready to serve Him in any way, under any circumstances. There are three different kinds of sanctification in the Bible.

1. *Positional sanctification* signifies that every believer at the moment of salvation acquires the absolute status quo of being set apart in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 1:2; Heb. 10:10; Col. 2:10). At the moment a person believes in Christ as Savior, he is entered into union with Christ; he shares all that Christ has and is; he is a partaker of the divine nature.¹³

2. *Experiential sanctification* is the function of the spiritual life after salvation that involves the believer’s spiritual growth by means of the filling of the Holy Spirit and the *grace apparatus for perception* (Eph. 5:26).¹⁴ The key to being sanctified in phase two¹⁵ is the proper use of 1 John 1:9 and learning Bible doctrine. This produces spiritual maturity.

3. *Ultimate sanctification* is the absolute status quo of every believer in his resurrection body in the eternal state (1 Cor. 15:35–54; Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:2). We will be set apart unto God for all eternity. We are assured of living in God’s presence forever.

Since sanctification is used in three different ways, we must always ask the question, How is sanctification used in the context of 1 Thessalonians 4:3? The answer is very simple. Since the will of God is the issue of phase two, it is God’s will for us while we are on earth to be in fellowship with the Lord and experientially “set apart” unto Him.

13. Thieme, *The Divine Outline of History: Dispensations and the Church* (1999), 92–93; *The Integrity of God* (1998), 95–100.

14. Thieme, *Reversionism* (2000).

15. Phase one, the moment of salvation; phase two, the life of the believer, which begins immediately after salvation and continues until either physical death or the Rapture (the resurrection of all dead Church Age believers and the removal of all living believers from the earth); and phase three, eternity in heaven.

For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor. (1 Thess. 4:3–4)

“That you abstain” introduces a purpose clause that begins to amplify some of the principles in connection with sanctification. The “vessel” here is analogous to the body of a believer (Acts 9:15; 2 Cor. 4:7; 2 Tim. 2:20–22) that is permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes the believer’s body a temple for the indwelling Jesus Christ. Since the believer’s body is the temple of God, he should glorify God, and this can only be done in the power of the filling of the Spirit.¹⁶

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Cor. 6:19–20)

Spirituality

It is the will of God that we are to be controlled by or filled with the Spirit.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit. (Eph. 5:18)

The filling of the Spirit excludes human good and provides the basis for producing divine good.¹⁷ No matter what Christian activity we may engage in—praying, giving, attending church, witnessing—if we are out of fellowship, it is human good. It is not the will of God to operate in carnality or human good, for both are repugnant to Him (Prov. 6:16–19; Isa. 64:6; Rom. 8:8).

16. Thieme, *The Divine Outline of History*, 128–31.

17. *Human good* is the benevolent production or deeds of the believer who is under the control of the sin nature. This production is indistinguishable from good deeds performed by an unbeliever, have no spiritual or eternal value, and are not rewardable in heaven. *Divine good* is Christian service or deeds produced by the believer under the filling of the Holy Spirit and are, therefore, acceptable to the perfect standards of God, have intrinsic and eternal value, and receive recognition and reward in heaven.

Thanksgiving

It is the will of God that we give thanks in everything. Thanksgiving is an expression of worship toward God that increases in capacity with the believer's advance to spiritual maturity. Gratitude is expressed through a moment-by-moment mental attitude arising from doctrine in the right lobe of the soul (Ps. 138:1–2), and through prayer (Eph. 5:20; Phil. 4:6; Col. 4:2).

In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thess. 5:18)

You are to be thankful, no matter what happens in your life. This can be quite a problem since everything that comes into your life is not pleasant. In fact, there is going to be a great deal of suffering, heartache, adversity, trial, and tribulation. But you need not be concerned, for there is a specific promise for the suffering of believers in supergrace or on the road to supergrace.¹⁸

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (Rom. 8:28)

If you are positive to the Word of God and taking in Bible doctrine consistently, on a daily basis, suffering can only be a blessing for you.¹⁹ All things are not good, far from it. But for the mature believer, "God causes all things to work together for good." All things in your life are not pleasant, but all things still work together for good; and since they do, it is God's will that you thank the Lord for *everything* that comes into your life—the suffering, the adversities, the trials and heartaches, as well as the blessings, the successes, and the victories. Remember, suffering is designed to bless the supergrace believer. Even the

18. Supergrace is the "greater grace" of James 4:6, the status of spiritual maturity in which the normal function of the Christian life and production of divine good begin; the status of advanced utilization of grace in both adversity and prosperity through knowledge of doctrine and continued intake of the Word of God; the area of reaping what God sows. Characterized by occupation with Christ and supergrace capacities—freedom, life, love, happiness, prosperity, adversity, and spiritual and material blessings—the believer with maximum doctrine in his soul glorifies God. See Thieme, *Reversionism*.

19. Thieme, *Christian Suffering* (1997), 54–58.

suffering of discipline is a blessing, for it is God's warning that you are not in His will and He is reminding you to rebound and keep advancing.

If you are to do the will of God, and if you are to be guided by the Lord, you must acquire knowledge of doctrine to provide capacity for suffering. Only the believer with doctrine in his soul can truly appreciate suffering as a form of blessing from the Lord. Do you, as a Christian, have the supergrace capacity to thank the Lord for every disagreeable thing that happened to you today? Do you have the capacity to thank the Lord for the heartaches, the problems, the difficulties? Capacity for this phase of Christian living comes only from positive volition to doctrine and then learning and applying that doctrine. Only then will you have capacity for all the suffering, as well as for the blessings, the victories, and the successes in your life.

Suffering

It is the will of God that we suffer.

For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right [for blessing] rather than for doing what is wrong [for discipline or punishment]. (1 Pet. 3:17)

Although there are many factors in this particular concept, when you understand that the purpose of suffering is blessing, then you begin to realize that God has a reason for it all. If it is God's will for you to suffer, then ultimately you will be blessed in suffering.

Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God [suffering for blessing in spiritual maturity] entrust their souls to a faithful Creator [the Lord Jesus Christ] in doing what is right. (1 Pet. 4:19)

God is always faithful to us even through suffering. Undeserved suffering is one way of directing our attention to the things that are important in life—fellowship with God, learning the Word, growing in grace, etc. Suffering honors Christ by proving the reality of our faith (1 Pet. 1:7), by developing obedience to His will (Heb. 5:8–9) and perseverance and confidence in the spiritual life (Rom. 5:3), and by restraining arrogance (2 Cor. 12:6–10).

Trusting

It is the will of God for every believer to trust the Lord.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart [right lobe of the soul],
And do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He will make your paths straight. (Prov. 3:5–6)

Do not depend on the human viewpoint of life, but rather on the divine or biblical viewpoint, trusting the Lord in every situation. Do you want God to guide you? Do you want Him to direct your path, to lead you along the way? Then here is how: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart” or right lobe. *The pure thoughts of doctrine, not the deceptive thoughts of man, are the basis for divine guidance.* Do not depend on your own understanding; do not depend on human viewpoint; do not depend on the thinking of other people. Think divine viewpoint in everything and He will direct your life. He will always guide you. There will never be a time when He will let you down—not even once!

Good Works

It is the will of God for every believer to produce divine good.

For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. (1 Pet. 2:15)

Here we see that “doing right,” or producing divine good, is the will of God. Believers are left on this earth to represent and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. Part of representing Him is to be effective in the realm of production, which is the natural by-product of spiritual maturity. Just as there is no place for human good in salvation (Eph. 2:8–9), there is no place for human good in the spiritual life.

After salvation, God provides the assets whereby we can glorify and serve Him, whereby we can represent Him effectively as ambassadors for Christ. Consequently, it is the will of God for the believer to produce divine good. However, all such production must be in the power and filling of the Holy Spirit.

TYPES OF THE WILL OF GOD

Three *classifications* of will exist in history. First, divine will or the sovereignty of God exists eternally, apart from the will of any creature.²⁰

Second, angelic will is the basis for the angelic conflict.²¹ Angelic will seeks to interfere with human history in an attempt to thwart divine will. To that purpose, Satan seeks to influence and undermine the salvation of unbelievers and to entice believers to ignore God's Word (Gen. 3:4), thereby preventing their advance to spiritual maturity. Satan is also in the business of keeping believers from reaching the correct geographical location (1 Thess. 2:18).

Third, human will was created to resolve the angelic conflict. God has given free will to mankind and He does not violate that free will. That is why some people are never saved. God permits unbelievers and believers to make decisions, whether or not they are compatible with His desire for them. The story of Balaam reveals three *types* of divine will and how His will interacts with human will and counteracts satanic will.

Directive Will of God

The directive will of God is the same as the desire of God. His directives are commands and prohibitions: "Do this! Don't do this!"

And God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them; you shall not curse the people; for they are blessed." (Num. 22:12)

Balak, King of Moab, wanted to hire Balaam to curse the Jews so the Moabites could defeat them. God's will for Balaam was to refuse to go with the messengers from Balak: "Do not go with them; you shall not curse the people." Hence, God's directive will prohibited Balaam from accompanying them.

20. Thieme, *The Integrity of God*, 240–63.

21. The angelic conflict is the invisible spiritual warfare in which the forces of Satan are warring against the forces of God that was ignited by the prehistoric revolt of the devil and one-third of all the angels and is resolved by the creation of mankind and by the continuing spiritual warfare of human history. See Thieme, *Satan and Demonism* (1996), 1–9.

Permissive Will of God

The permissive will of God means that God allows man to make decisions and allows certain things to happen even though they are not His desire. God does not coerce human volition. Balaam had decided to go contrary to God's directive will. Balaam was operating on materialism lust from his old sin nature;²² since Balaam was determined to become rich, he desperately wanted the fee from Balak for cursing the Jews. Wealth was more important to Balaam than submitting to the will of God. Therefore, he used his negative volition to disobey the will of God.

And God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men have come to call you, rise up *and* go with them; but only the word which I speak to you shall you do." (Num. 22:20)

The fact that God permitted Balaam to go indicates divine recognition of free will. If God had violated the free will of Balaam, then God would not be glorified by such coercion. In grace, God sought to deter Balaam's obstinance. But once Balaam went on negative signals, God stood aside and permitted him to go. However, God will be glorified and His plan for human history is always accomplished in spite of the hostile decisions of man (Ps. 76:10).

God disciplines for disobedience, but He does not force obedience. While the righteousness of God did not violate Balaam's human volition, the justice of God disciplined Balaam. God's discipline was a demonstration of His love for Balaam to motivate him to get back into God's will (Prov. 3:12; Heb. 12:6).

Overruling Will of God

The overruling will of God means that Jesus Christ controls history.

But God was angry because he [Balaam] was going, and the angel of the Lord took his stand in the way as an adversary against him. Then the Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth and said, "Return to Balak, and you shall speak

22. Thieme, *Old Sin Nature vs. Holy Spirit*.

thus.” Then Balak said to Balaam, “What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, but behold, you have actually blessed them!” And he [Balaam] answered and said, “Must I not be careful to speak what the Lord puts in my mouth?” Then Balak said to Balaam, “Do not curse them at all nor bless them at all!” But Balaam answered and said to Balak, “Did I not tell you, ‘Whatever the Lord speaks, that I must do’?” (Num. 22:22a; 23:5, 11–12, 25–26)

Balaam was not permitted to curse the Jews for several reasons. First of all, the discipline and judgment of Israel is always a divine prerogative. Second, Balaam’s curse would have been tantamount to anti-Semitism (Gen. 12:1–3),²³ which involves Satan and demons as well as negative human volition. Under God’s overruling will, in keeping with His promise of Genesis 12:2, He exercises His divine sovereignty to protect His people from satanic action. Consequently, Balaam was hindered from cursing the Jews.

The directive will of God is the exercise of His sovereignty, which would not allow Israel to be cursed. The permissive will of God involves the negative volition of a human being, in this case, Balaam. The overruling will of God involves divine frustration of satanic will. Satan desired to curse Israel, but God would not permit it.

THE MECHANICS OF DIVINE GUIDANCE ACTS 11:5–16

How does God actually go about guiding people? The story of Peter and Cornelius emphasizes seven mechanics of divine guidance. By way of background, in Acts 11:1–4, the Jewish believers in Jerusalem had received news that Peter had preached the Gospel to the Gentiles (v. 1). When Peter returned to Jerusalem from the house of Cornelius in Caesarea, they questioned him about the gentile Pentecost (v. 2).²⁴ These legalistic believers opposed and criticized Peter for eating with

23. Thieme, *Anti-Semitism* (1991), 20–22.

24. Pentecost refers to the day in *ca.* A.D. 30 when the descending of the Holy Spirit and His indwelling and filling of believers heralded the commencement of the Church Age.

uncircumcised Gentiles who did not observe Jewish dietary laws (v. 3).²⁵ Peter explained the situation by describing retrospectively what had happened in Caesarea and Joppa (v. 4). As he recounts these events, factors in God's guidance become apparent.

Guidance through Prayer

Peter relates his experience:

“I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision.” (Acts 11:5a)

The believer has a legitimate right to ask God for guidance, for clarification in prayer. Guidance through prayer is authentic only when a believer is confronted with a situation which is not specified by some direct statement of the Bible. For example, it is not necessary for a believer to pray for guidance in regard to marrying an unbeliever because the Bible specifically forbids this (2 Cor. 6:14). However, we certainly may seek God's guidance through prayer in the matter of *which* believer we should marry. There are many times when we as believers may go to the throne of grace “that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). Often this is a time when we need guidance in a particular matter, and God provides that guidance as we seek it through prayer (Matt. 21:22).

How are we guided through prayer? Our prayers are not answered in a flash of mystical revelation. They are not direct answers from the voice of God Himself. He may answer in unexpected ways. He may answer the desire of our petition but not our specific petition. But if we trust that an answer will be supplied and apply doctrine from our souls, we will discover His guidance in the matter. A ‘door’ will either open wide or shut; we will either get a bump on our head as the door slams, or have a smile on our face as we walk through the door.

25. These legalistic Jewish believers were erroneously attempting to live the unique spiritual life of the Church Age through strict conformity to Codex III of the Mosaic Law; in this case, specifically the dietary laws governing what a Jew could eat. See Thieme, *Levitical Offerings* (1973), 2.

Guidance through the Right Lobe of the Soul

“And when I had fixed my gaze upon it and was observing it [κατανοέω, *katanoeo*].” (Acts 11:6a)

Katanoeo, “observing,” in the imperfect active indicative means “to ponder something very carefully in your mind.” God always leads in compliance with His Word, never contrary to His Word. Guidance comes through the Word of God, which must be assimilated; for the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit is operative only through knowledge of doctrine. The two are correlated by Romans 8:14: “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God [mature sons].” The more we know about the Word of God, the more we understand the will of God.

Were it not for doctrine in Peter’s right lobe, he would not have gone to Caesarea. In Caesarea he pondered on the things that he saw, and he recognized God’s will through correlating the situation with his knowledge of the Word. Peter observed and evaluated from divine viewpoint that Church Age believers were no longer governed by the dietary laws of the Mosaic Law (Acts 11:6b–10). Therefore, he ate with the Gentiles. Under the concept of divine guidance, God intends for the believer to use the mentality of the right lobe of the soul to discern His will.

Guidance through God’s Word

“I also heard a [divine] voice saying to me.” (Acts 11:7a)

Before the canon of Scripture was completed, there were several ways in which God communicated with believers. There was direct communication, known as the spoken word, “Thus says the Lord;” dreams, trances, visions, Old Testament preaching, and Old Testament Scripture were other ways in which God guided His people. Peter was guided through divine revelation, which in this case, during the unique, opening period of the Church Age, was a trance in which instructions were given directly by God (Acts 11:5a). But now that we have the complete canon of Scripture,²⁶ our guidance comes *only* through the Word of God, not through the actual “voice” of God Himself.

26. Thieme, *Canonicity* (2002).

Guidance through Providential Circumstances

“And behold, at that moment three men appeared before the house in which we were *staying*, having been sent to me from Caesarea.” (Acts 11:11)

Three men had made the day’s journey from Caesarea to the house in Joppa where Peter was “staying.” Their arrival constituted providential circumstances. The work of God is often called providence by which He molds all events into the fulfillment of His eternal purpose. But we must be careful in interpreting these circumstances; they can be deceptive. Sometimes circumstances are to *test* us with regard to knowing the will of God. If a door opens that is contrary to God’s Word and we walk through, it demonstrates that we do not believe and apply the doctrines of His Word. However, there are many cases where *God* opens doors and guides believers through providential circumstances, and this is a bona fide type of guidance.

Guidance through the Filling of the Holy Spirit

“And the Spirit told me to go with them [to Caesarea] without misgivings.” (Acts 11:12a)

This was direct revelation from the Holy Spirit in a “vision” that led Peter to Caesarea. But today, the Holy Spirit never guides the believer apart from His filling ministry and the written revelation of Bible doctrine. The Holy Spirit cannot guide the believer when he grieves or quenches Him (1 Thess. 5:19; Eph. 4:30). Again we have the necessity for the filling of the Spirit. We must understand that the will of God is that we be habitually filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:17–18). Then, we can begin to understand His plan for each of us individually.

Guidance through Comparison of Events

Cornelius held the key to Peter’s vision. When Peter arrived at the house of Cornelius, an event occurred that led to Peter’s further guidance. We have a verification of the situation in Acts 11:15:

“The Holy Spirit fell upon them [Cornelius and his gentile friends], just as *He did* upon us [the Jews] at the beginning [day of Pentecost].” (Acts 11:15b)

By connecting the phenomenon of Pentecost in Jerusalem to the phenomenon that Peter witnessed in the “house” of Cornelius (v. 13), this parallel confirmed to him that gentile believers were just as much in the Church as Jewish believers. God’s plan was for both Jew and Gentile to share an identical position in Christ in the new dispensation called the Church Age. This is further substantiated by Ephesians 2:14 and 1 Corinthians 10:32.

Guidance through Recalling Scripture

“And I remembered the word of the Lord.” (Acts 11:16a)

Peter did not review the sermons he spoke in Caesarea with the people in Jerusalem. He did not go into great detail in reciting the events; but he did make it very clear that he remembered the words which Jesus spoke in Acts 1:5: “For John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now [on Pentecost].”

As Peter recalled this, it contributed considerably to his guidance from God—to his understanding that both Jewish and gentile believers had received the power to live the unique spiritual life of the Church Age (Acts 1:8). Again Peter was guided because he had Scripture in his right lobe, and he recalled it at the proper time.

CONCLUSION

Let us go back to one basic principle: It is the will of God that all members of the human race be saved. He is “not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9b). “And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 3:23a).

Perhaps at this very moment you are trying to decide for yourself: Am I in a position to do the will of God? If you have not received Christ as your Savior, then that question must have a negative answer. Can you do the will of God? No person on the face of this earth can do the will of God until he believes in Jesus Christ. The very first time in your life when you accomplish God’s will is that moment when you personally believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving Him as your Savior.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right [power] to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name. (John 1:12)

Jesus Christ did all of the work in salvation. There is nothing we can do. There is no energy-of-the-flesh activity, there is no human deed or work which can be added to this “so great salvation” (Heb. 2:3, KJV). God the Father is the author of the plan of salvation, and God the Father is perfect. Since God the Father is perfect, His plan is perfect. But if in any point of the plan man and his energy-of-the-flesh works enter into the picture, then it is no longer the perfect plan of God. Hence, man’s deeds cannot in any way be involved in salvation. All of the work has already been accomplished by Jesus Christ on the cross. He died for our sins. He took our place.

And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross.
(1 Pet. 2:24a)

As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us. (Ps.
103:12)

There is nothing we can add; there is nothing we can take from this incomparable salvation. Since it was accomplished over two thousand years ago, there is nothing left for us today but to enter into the plan by faith alone. Jesus says, “I am the door; if any one enters through Me, he shall be saved” (John 10:9a). You can enter only through the Lord Jesus Christ. Entering this door is a simple matter. It means simply to believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior.

But these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:31)

If you desire eternal salvation, if you want the forgiveness and purification of presalvation sins—all the sins committed before salvation—and the promise of forgiveness and purification of postsalvation sins through rebound, and if you want divine guidance to do the will of God, you must begin at this point:

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved.” (Acts 16:31b)

As a believer in Jesus Christ, you are free to pursue the individual plan of God for your life as you are guided by Him. To summarize the principles of divine guidance, first and foremost, we must have the power to execute the will of God. God's will cannot be executed in the energy of the flesh. This is humanly impossible. The only way to do the will of God is through the power of the filling of the Holy Spirit. "All who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Rom. 8:14). This is the concept of submission to the will of God. As a result of being filled with the Spirit, through the principle of 1 John 1:9, we can submit to God's will, not just when we know it but even before we know it. In other words, we are here to do His will and, therefore, we are willing to do His will. Second, the will of God is contained in one book, the Word of God. We must know the Word of God to do the will of God. Finally, spiritual growth and maturity are essential in understanding and accomplishing the will of God. Add to this the mandates, categories, and mechanics of divine guidance, and we have the fundamentals for executing the will of God.

This study constitutes the general biblical concept of guidance and gives an overall appreciation of the subject; but it does not tell you what to do in each specific case. This must be determined from your individual application of doctrines and principles in the Word of God. Divine guidance is a matter of understanding the biblical mandates that impart God's will, growing to spiritual maturity, and depending on the Lord to reveal the details of His will for your life.

For such is God,
Our God forever and ever;
He will guide us until death. (Ps. 48:14)

Appendix

THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE GUIDANCE

- I. Definition: Divine guidance is the doctrine of determining the will of God for mankind; the communication of divine will through divine revelation.
- II. Cardinal principle of divine guidance (1 John 3:23):
 - A. For unbeliever—salvation (2 Pet. 3:9).
 - B. For believer—spirituality (Eph. 5:18) and virtue-love (1 John 3:23*b*).
- III. Three categories of will in history:
 - A. Sovereign will of God.
 - B. Angelic will.
 - C. Human will.
- IV. The humanity of Christ had free will (Matt. 26:42; Heb. 10:7, 9)
 - A. No free will in mankind would imply no free will in the humanity of Christ.
 - B. The basic principle of divine guidance, however, is based on the fact that man possesses volition of the soul as free will.

- V. Types of the will of God as related to the human race (e.g., Balaam):
- A. Directive will is the same as the desire of God. His directives are commands and prohibitions: “Do this; Don’t do this” (Num. 22:12).
 - B. Permissive will is what God allows to happen because He has given free will to man (Num. 22:20).
 - C. Overruling will is the principle that Jesus Christ controls history (Num. 23).
- VI. Mandates of divine guidance:
- A. *Submit* to the will of God by being filled with the Holy Spirit to empower obedience to God’s will (Rom. 6:13; 12:1–2; Eph. 5:17–18; 1 John 1:9).
 - B. *Know* the will of God by accumulating Bible doctrine in the right lobe of the soul (Ps. 32:8; Prov. 3:1–6; Isa. 58:11; Rom. 12:2).
 - C. *Grow* in the will of God by advancing to spiritual maturity in order to execute His will to the maximum (2 Pet. 3:18; James 4:6).
- VII. The will of God for believers:
- A. Viewpoint will of God: What does He want me to think?
 - B. Operational will of God: What does He want me to do?
 - C. Geographical will of God: Where does He want me to be?
- VIII. Mechanics of divine guidance (Acts 11):
- A. Guidance through prayer (v. 5).
 - B. Guidance through the right lobe of the soul (v. 6).
 - C. Guidance through God’s Word (vs. 7–10).
 - D. Guidance through providential circumstances (v. 11).
 - E. Guidance through the filling of the Holy Spirit (v. 12).
 - F. Guidance through comparison of events (vs. 13–15).
 - G. Guidance through recalling Scripture (v. 16).

Glossary

angelic conflict The invisible spiritual warfare in which the forces of Satan are warring against the forces of God that continues as spiritual warfare in human history.

divine good Christian service or deeds produced by the believer under the filling of the Holy Spirit that are, therefore, acceptable to the perfect standards of God, have intrinsic and eternal value, and receive recognition and reward in heaven.

faith-rest The divine mandate requiring the believer to claim the promises of God and related doctrinal principles, and unite them with belief in God's Word to generate tranquillity of soul and the ability to think under pressure in the midst of the adversities and prosperities of life. It is exploited to the maximum only in the supergrace life.

grace apparatus for perception (GAP) The divine provision for spiritual comprehension, growth, and advancement empowered by the filling of the Holy Spirit that enables every believer to understand, learn, and apply the entire realm of Bible doctrine, regardless of education or human IQ.

legalism The trend of mankind's sin nature that makes futile attempts through human efforts to earn salvation, spirituality, or the approbation

of God by strict conformity to a code of ethics, religion, or morality and results in the production of sin, human good, and evil.

rebound The grace method by which the carnal believer receives forgiveness by naming personal sins privately to God the Father. As a result, the believer regains spirituality, is restored to fellowship with God in time, recovers the filling of the Holy Spirit, and resumes the spiritual life.

right lobe The dominant lobe of the mentality of the soul, designated by the Greek word *kardia*, which circulates Bible doctrine through the soul's stream of consciousness—frame of reference, memory center, vocabulary, categorical storage, the conscience, momentum, and wisdom compartments—to support the spiritual life of the believer.

sin nature The source of temptation to commit sin, human good, and evil inherent in the cell structure of the human body; the center of rebellion toward God when in control of the soul. Composed of an area of strength which produces human good, an area of weakness which produces personal sin, trends toward legalism or antinomianism, and lust patterns, it was originally acquired by Adam at his fall and is subsequently transmitted genetically to all mankind through procreation. At birth, God imputes Adam's original sin to the sin nature (Rom. 5:12), resulting in spiritual death, the sovereignty of the sin nature over human life (Rom. 6:12), and total depravity of all humanity, except Jesus Christ. Because of the virgin birth, Jesus Christ was born without a sin nature. The sin nature is the "old man" of Ephesians 4:22 (KJV); the Adamic nature or "flesh" of Romans 8:3–4; the principle of "sin" of Romans 6:12; 7:8–20.

supergrace The "greater grace" of James 4:6, the status of spiritual maturity in which the normal function of the Christian life and production of divine good begin; the place of advanced utilization of grace in either adversity or prosperity through knowledge of doctrine and continued intake of the Word of God; the area of reaping what God sows. Characterized by occupation with Christ and supergrace capacities—freedom, life, love, happiness, prosperity, adversity, and spiritual and material blessings—the believer with maximum doctrine in his soul glorifies God.

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